

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TANANARIVE 1317

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: PGOV, MA

SUBJECT: UNCERTAINTY CONTINUES FOLLOWING PM'S DEATH

REF: TANANARIVE 1247

SUMMARY. ALTHOUGH BELATEDLY ANNOUNCED, GOVERNMENT WAS "DISSOLVED" A FEW DAYS AFTER PM RAKOTOMALALA'S DEATH. WE EXPECT ONLY A FEW CHANGES IN NEW CABINET. SUPREME REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL (WHICH RANKS AHEAD OF CABINET) NOW BALANCED SLIGHTLY IN FAVOR OF CIVILIANS, SINCE CIVILIAN REPLACED MILITARY OFFICER AS PM. NEW CHIEF OF STAFF MAY NOT BE MOST QUALIFIED INDIVIDUAL BUT MAY BE MOST ACCEPTABLE TO ALL PARTIES. FRENCH INVESTIGATION TEAM CONCLUDED THAT HELICOPTER WHICH CAUSED PM'S DEATH WAS NOT SABOTAGED, BUT TEAM'S REPORT WILL NOT BE PUBLISHED. POLITICAL TRACTS AND RUMORS CONTINUE TO CIRCULATE BUT CANNOT YET BE CONSIDERED AS SYMPTOMATIC OF OVERALL DISSATISFACTION WITH RATSIRAKA. END SUMMARY.

1. ON AUGUST 2 GDRM ISSUED DECREE DISSOLVING GOVERNMENT AS RESULT OF PM RAKOTOMALALA'S DEATH; HOWEVER, NEWS OF DECREE WAS NOT MADE PUBLIC UNTIL AUGUST 11. AT FIRST, IT APPEARED THAT RATSIRAKA WOULD USE OCCASION OF PM'S DEATH
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TO MAKE NUMEROUS CABINET CHANGES WHICH HE REPORTEDLY WANTED.

IT APPEARS THAT, AS RESULT OF HIS EXTENSIVE DISCUSSIONS WITH SUPREME REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL (CSR) AND CARETAKER CABINET, MAKING NUMEROUS CHANGES WOULD RISK UNSETTLING EXISTING POLITICAL BALANCE WHICH ASSURES SUPPORT FOR RATSIRAKA'S OWN TENURE. IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO REPLACE LATE MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND MINISTER OF EDUCATION (PREVIOUS INCUMBENT NOW BEING PM), BUT IT IS UNLIKELY THAT MORE THAN ONE OR TWO OTHER CHANGES WILL BE MADE. WE HAVE NOT HEARD THAT THERE MAY BE ANY CHANGES IN MAKEUP OF CSR, WHICH NOW NUMBERS EIGHT CIVILIANS (INCLUDING NEW PM) AND SIX MILITARY (INCLUDING RATSIRAKA) VS. SEVEN AND SEVEN PREVIOUSLY, BUT CIVILIAN-MILITARY IMBALANCE MAY CAUSE SOME CONCERN AMONG MILITARY MEMBERS OF CSR WHO SEE DIMINISHED ROLE OF MILITARY IF PREVIOUS BALANCE IS NOT RESTORED.

2. LT. COL. JEAN RAKOTOHARISON, COMMANDER OF FORCES OF INTERVENTION, HAS BEEN NAMED ACTING ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF, REPLACING LATE COL. ALPHONSE RAKOTONIRAINY. ALTHOUGH RAKOTOHARISON IS KNOWN AS "OLD SERGEANT" AND LACKS THE BROAD BACKGROUND FOR THE CHIEF OF STAFF JOB, HE REPORTEDLY MAY KEEP THE JOB PERMANENTLY BECAUSE OTHER SENIOR OFFICERS WITH EXPERIENCE AND ABILITY ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE FOR ONE REASON OR ANOTHER. SOME WERE TAINTED BY THE "EVENTS" OF 1975, A FEW ARE (OR AT LEAST WERE) RIVALS OF RATSIRAKA'S FOR POWER, AND SOME SIMPLY ARE NOT WELL LIKED. RAKOTOHARISON IS AN AMIABLE, GRUFF, AND BARREL-CHESTED OFFICER WHO APPEARS TO BE LIKED BY MOST, IF NOT ALL, AND THEREFORE THE LEAST DAMAGING TO ANYONE'S INTERESTS, PARTICULARLY RATSIRAKA'S.

3. THERE IS SOME SPECULATION THAT RATSIRAKA MAY TAKE THE DEFENSE PORTFOLIO HIMSELF, IT PREVIOUSLY HAVING BEEN HELD BY THE LATE PM. MINISTER OF INTERIOR MAMPILA JAONA IS ACTING AS CARETAKER MINISTER, BUT SINCE HE IS GENDARMERIE OFFICER, IT IS NOT LIKELY HE WOULD RETAIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES FOR DEFENSE. MOREOVER, THERE IS SOME QUESTION AS TO MAMPILA'S OVERALL SAVVINESS. IT IS ALSO UNLIKELY THAT A CIVILIAN WOULD TAKE OVER DEFENSE, SINCE MILITARY MIGHT BECOME INCENSED BY FURTHER DIMINUTION OF THEIR STRENGTH IF

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NEW CSR BALANCE (SEE PREVIOUS PARA) REMAINS CONSTANT.

4. WE HAVE HEARD FROM FRENCH EMBASSY SOURCES THAT FRENCH TEAM OF EXPERTS SENT HERE TO INVESTIGATE HELICOPTER ACCIDENT WHICH CAUSED DEATHS OF RAKOTOMALALA ET AL CAME TO CONCLUSION THAT HELICOPTER WAS OPERATING PROPERLY AT TIME OF CRASH. TEAM'S REPORT, HOWEVER, WILL NOT BE PUBLISHED, ALLEGEDLY IN ACCORDANCE WITH MALAGASY PRACTICE. TEAM'S

FINDINGS LEAVE ONLY ONE OTHER POSSIBLE SOLUTION: PILOT ERROR, OR ACCIDENT TO PILOT. NON-PUBLICATION OF TEAM'S REPORT WILL THEREFORE MAKE WHOLE EPISODE A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF TROUBLE, SINCE SPECULATION CONTINUES TO BE RIPE THAT HELICOPTER WAS SABOTAGED. WHETHER IT WAS OR NOT WILL NEVER BE KNOWN TO MALAGASY PUBLIC, WHEREAS IT IS KNOWN THAT RATSIMANDRAVA WAS ACTUALLY ASSASSINATED IN 1975, YET PERPETRATORS HAVE NEVER BEEN "FOUND."

5. RUMORS OF RESTIVENESS IN VARIOUS CIRCLES (INCLUDING SOME MILITARY CIRCLES) HAVE SUBSIDED, ALTHOUGH AS REPORTED REFTTEL, WE GAVE LITTLE CREDENCE TO THEIR IMPORTANCE AT THIS TIME. HOWEVER, POLITICAL TRACTS ARE CONTINUING TO CIRCULATE AND APPEAR TO ACCUSE ALL MEMBERS OF CSR AND CABINET, AS WELL AS RATSIRAKA BROTHERS OF COURSE, OF COMPLICITY AND EVEN MALFEASANCE IN PRESENT POOR STATE OF MADAGASCAR'S AFFAIRS. SOME SOURCES HAVE RECENTLY TOLD US THAT GENDARMERIE IS BEHIND EARLIER RUMORS AND TRACTS; RATSIRAKA HAS ALWAYS BEEN ON OUTS WITH GENDARMERIE, WHOSE FORMER LEADER (RESPECTED BY RANK-AND-FILE THROUGHOUT COUNTRY, WITH RATSIRAKA IS NOT) WAS LATE PRESIDENT RATSIMANDRAVA, RATSIRAKA'S ARCH-RIVAL FOR POWER IN EARLY 1975.

6. OVERALL COMMENT. DURING THIS PERIOD FOLLOWING DEATHS OF PM ET AL, WE DO NOT EXPECT, EVEN IF DISSIDENTS ARE MORE POWERFUL AND READY FOR ACTION THAN WE ESTIMATE, THAT THERE WILL BE MOVE AT THIS TIME TO UNSEAT RATSIRAKA. FORMER ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF WAS A MODERATE AND WAS NOT LIKELY TO ASSENT TO MILITARY PLOTTING UNTIL NON-MILITARY PRESSURES BECAME SUBSTANTIAL. HIS DEATH LEFT VACUUM IN MILITARY CIRCLES

THAT WILL NOT EASILY BE FILLED. FORMER ACTING
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CHIEF OF STATE GENERAL ANDRIAMAHAZO, WHO LAST WEEK RETURNED FROM MONTH IN EUROPE, WILL PROBABLY ASSUME LATE CHIEF OF STAFF'S TEMPORIZING ROLE EVEN THOUGH WE KNOW HE IS VERY CRITICAL OF RATSIRAKA'S LEADERSHIP AND DRIFT TOWARD SOVIETS. MILITARY HERE ARE NOT EAGER, AS A GROUP, TO DESTABILIZE THE COUNTRY, BUT THEY KNOW THAT IN AN EXTREME SITUATION THEY WOULD BE ONLY COHESIVE FORCE IN THE COUNTRY.
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